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FOLK-LORE.

NO. II.

BY MR. D. BYRNE.

[Read at the Meeting of May 1st.]

IN laying before the Meeting some curious instances of that fairy-lore which is almost universally connected in the minds of the Irish peasantry, with the *Raths* and *Duns* which cover the face of the country, I beg leave to introduce a few observations respecting the *Rath* of *Baile-na-g-cloch*, which is a characteristic example of that class of antiquities. After the final defeat of the Munster invaders at *Bealach-Mor-Osraidhe*, *Cuchorb* gave *Lughaidh Laighis* the part of Leinster called *Ceann-teine* (*Ceann-teine*), afterwards denominated *Laoighise* (*Laoighise*), *Léix* or *Leix*, in the Queen's County. *Lughaidh Laighis* is said to have erected his palace in the centre of his kingdom, and mid-way on the line of battle. This once regal residence is known by the name of the *Rath* of *Baile-na-g-cloch*. It is situate on the field on which were slaughtered so great a number of the retreating Momonians.

The members of the Kilkenny Archæological Society will, perhaps, require some authorities—historical or traditional—for my assertion respecting the *Rath* of *Baile-na-g-cloch*. In order to gratify their curiosity, I shall faithfully relate the tradition of the country as I have received it. I was assured by one man, who was about seventy years of age, and a great repository of traditions—that in a very remote age, one of the great O'Mores conquered an army from Munster, that invaded this county. The battle was fought from the *Dun* of *Cloch-an-Phuca* to *Abbeyleix*; but in *Baile-na-g-cloch* the most dreadful slaughter was made, so that hundreds of the Munster soldiers lay dead on the plain. After the battle, O'More built the *Rath* on which he resided—and after him, his successors for ages. We learn from history, that *Louis* of Leinster, after he became possessed of his kingdom, built a splendid residence, and this royal abode cannot be discovered in any other part of the ancient territory.

The outside bank of this monument of antiquity, is twenty-four feet high from the bottom of the entrenchment to the top of the bank; from the bottom of the entrenchment on the south-west, to the top of the tumulus, is fifty feet. The *Rath*-banks on the west and all round, are thirty-six feet high from the bottom of the entrenchment to the top of the *Rath*. The diameter of the *Rath* is fifty-six yards. On the top of the *Rath*, at the south-west side, is a tumulus, surrounded by an inner entrenchment in half-moon form. From the bottom of this half-circle to the top of the tumulus, is thirty-nine feet. From the bottom of the same half-circle to the level of the top of the *Rath*,

is fifteen feet. On the breast of the tumulus towards the east, are some very ancient hawthorns.

It may perhaps be conjectured that hawthorns were held sacred by the Pagan Irish. The hawthorn or *Uath* (*Uath*) in the Irish language, signifies "ancient or durable." The leaves of that tree may perhaps have represented the plurality of the gods which they worshipped—mystically represented by the forked form of each hawthorn leaf; as the shamrock of three leaves on each stem, represents the three divine persons in the one God of the Christians. The Pagans, though they worshipped a plurality of gods, nevertheless acknowledged that there was one Supreme Being; consequently, the body and stem of each hawthorn leaf represent, according to the Pagan mythology, that Supreme Being; and the forked parts of each and every leaf, the plurality of the gods to whom they paid divine worship. If I am asked my authority for this supposition, my answer is, that it is simply my own opinion. When Saint Patrick took up the shamrock, and presented it as a representation of the unity of three persons in one God, might it not have been suggested to him by the fact of the Pagan polytheism being believed by his hearers to be represented by the forked forms of the leaves of the hawthorn? The information which we receive from the ancients does not extend to the aboriginal ideas of religion held by the *Celtæ* in their first state; we may, nevertheless, conclude that they had some imperfect notion of a Supreme Being, before the Druids framed a system of polytheism. When the Scythians became incorporated with the *Celtæ*, about 1200 years before Christ according to Sir Isaac Newton, the Scytho-Celts corrupted into polytheism the original opinions of the first Druids concerning God, so that Vesta, Apollo, Venus, Neptune, Mars and Vulcan, were worshipped in the Scytho-Celtic primitive ages. Afterwards their polytheism became even more corrupted. The sun and moon became the principal deities of the Pagan Irish. The sun was adored by the name of *Grian*, and his power as a divinity stands pre-eminent in the mythology of Irish Paganism. We find by a perusal of St. Patrick's life, that idols were in existence in the days of that illustrious Apostle. "King *Laoghaire*," says the historian, "adored a certain idol named *Ceann-crothi*, that is, Head of the Gods; around this idol stood twelve inferior gods; all which the marvellous man of God destroyed by lifting against them the staff of Christ." Hence, we learn that the Pagan Irish worshipped a plurality of gods in the days of St. Patrick.

With regard to the hawthorn being held sacred by the Pagan Irish, I am supported by the traditions and opinions of the Irish peasantry in general. All *Raths* in Ireland are venerated as places sacred to invisible and sometimes visible beings, denominated the "good-people" or fairies; so that any person who destroys a *Rath*, or cuts a hawthorn on a *Rath*, is accounted to have incurred their enmity. I shall here give

a few traditional accounts appertaining to this popular belief. About twenty years past, two brothers named Bergan, who resided on a farm in the townland of Coult, a few miles beyond Ballyroan, destroyed the hawthorns of a *Rath* by stubbing them. After the work was accomplished, one of the brothers was fairy-stricken, as so denominated—in other words, he was afflicted by the invisible inhabitants of the *Rath* for destroying their sacred hawthorns. All remedies failed, and he died an example of their displeasure. One Thomas Eleford, who was an eye-witness, positively assured me that nothing could be more evident or more true! In the townland of Garryglass, on a small hill, called the *Cnocán* (*Cnocan*), a large hawthorn stands, being the last remaining on a *Rath*, the entrenchments of which are now demolished. The traditions which I have received respecting this hawthorn are very strange. About fifty years ago a man named Donnelly farmed the land on which the hawthorn flourished. He cut it down, after which all his cattle died, and also his children. He became a poor man, and was evicted. A family of the name of Dug next possessed the farm. One of the Dugs cut off a bough from the hawthorn which grew up from the stump. Dug, after so doing, was taken up from the ground by a whirl-blast, and cast down so violently, that his arm was broken. Michael Dug, his brother, was deprived of reason to such a degree, that he ran distracted and naked, nor did he ever regain his original faculties! After some time, a family named Foyle rented the farm. One of the Foyles, by quarrying limestone, undermined the hawthorn, so that it fell—after the fall, two cows belonging to Foyle died, and a child of his was born a cripple. Foyle, by the power of men and horses, set up the hawthorn again; nevertheless, he remains a poor man. I have made accurate inquiry respecting the strange accounts given of this hawthorn, and in all my inquiry, I have been assured the accounts were positively true! Michael Byrne, a man who resides near to the hawthorn, has assured me that he has seen frequently, during winter nights, lights, as candle-lights, coming from the *Rath* of *Baile-na-g-cloch* to this hawthorn.

I have been informed by a friend, John Dunne, who resides near *Cruachan* hill, in the King's County, that a remarkable hawthorn grows near to his farm, on the banks of a circle or *Rath*; and that a young man, contrary to the will of his master, went to cut down the hawthorn; but when in the attitude of striking the first blow, he was cast violently to the earth, and his face turned over one of his shoulders! My friend saw him in that state, and also was present when a man versed in charms and spells, restored the distorted countenance to its original aspect; this he positively asserts. But that I should trespass on the valuable time of the learned Society, I could give similar and yet stranger legends. I shall, however, only mention the following:—In the year 1797, an army of elves or fairies, was seen, it is declared, in mid-day, on the bog of *Móin-bhan* (*Moin-bhan*), between Maryborough and Strad-

bally. About fifteen years ago, hundreds of them were seen crossing the hills of Ballyfriar, on the east of Stradbally. About thirty years past, the west side of Cullenagh mountain was covered by them, marching towards the south. Several persons in the village of Ballyroan, say they beheld them in mid-day! About one mile from Ballyroan, towards Maryborough, in a place called Cashell, stood a solitary hawthorn, esteemed sacred to the invisible and ancient inhabitants of Ireland. On a fine summer's evening, a person who dwelt opposite the hawthorn, beheld an army of soldiers, many hundreds in number, marching up to the hawthorn. He became affrighted, and returned into his house; but, on his going out after some time, to his great astonishment he beheld the many hundreds creeping on the boughs of the hawthorn as bees, and each soldier about as large as a man's finger.

The accounts I here give will, no doubt, appear strange; nevertheless, far be it from me to be superstitious in fairy-lore, or credulous respecting every vague tale. I have made accurate inquiry, and the peasantry strongly assert the truth of the traditions which I have given.

In connection with this subject, I may mention that a remarkable Druidical circle is situate on *Chnocín Ban* (*Cnoicín Ban*), i.e. the Little White Hill, in this neighbourhood; it occurs on the land of John Keating, in the parish of Dysart-Garland, the property of Mrs. Keating, of Tenny-Park, near Kilkenny. This ancient remain consists of three concentric circles. The first, or inner circle, measures fifteen yards in diameter; the second, fifty-four yards, and the external circle, seventy-six yards in diameter. Although a *Cromleac*, which is said to have stood in the centre, and the upright stones of the circles have long since been removed—yet the traces of the circles are quite distinct, and evince great antiquity. Some years since an instrument of pure gold was found in a field near the circles, which appears to have been the ring of a fibula or brooch; it was of a half-moon shape, and about the size of the iron heel of a man's shoe, the bar of gold which formed it was about the width of a six-pence, and quite round; the continuity of the straight side, or cord of the semi-circle, was broken in the centre, to allow the pin of the brooch to play. This valuable antique was sold in Carlow, by an ignorant woman, for two pounds.

The *Dun* of *Cloch-an-Phuca*, in the same district, is also believed by the peasantry to be a favorite haunt of the "good people;" but the traditions connected with it are of a more sombre cast. One, very generally related by the farmers' fire-side, is to the effect, that about fifty years since, a regular pitched battle was fought between two parties of those supernatural beings, the combatants being ranged on either side of the old narrow *Dun*-road. The hawthorns and blackthorns on either side, were crushed and broken, as if trampled beneath the feet of thousands of cavalry and infantry. The tradition even goes so far as to assert, that specks of blood were discoverable on the branches of trees, and leaves of bushes; and what rendered it the more extraordinary was the alleged fact, that the previous evening saw the fields

and hedges uninjured and blooming. There is also another fairy legend current amongst the neighbours, to the effect that one fine summer's evening, numbers of horsemen were beheld on the *Dun*, who galloped round its circumference, and finally leaped their horses down a precipice, one hundred and thirty feet in height. At the foot of this steep descent there is a very curious natural cave, an attempt to explore the recesses of which is said to have been made by the emissaries of a learned Society from Dublin, about half a century ago. The story runs, however, that when they had, by blasting the rocks, penetrated about one hundred and fifty yards, they were suddenly confronted, and driven out by some strange supernatural creature of huge size, resembling a cat! A somewhat novel phase in fairy-lore is afforded by another form, in which the tradition respecting the *Puca*, or spirit of the cave, presents itself—for from the name of that most malignant of the elfin race, the *Dun* derives its appellation of *Cloch-an-Phuca*, or “the Puca’s Rock.” The eccentric spirit frequently assumes the strange shape of a fleece of wool; and issuing from the cavern, rolls over the adjacent fields with astonishing celerity, its motions being accompanied with a mysterious buzzing sound, inspiring terror in all within hearing, whether man or beast. I was often assured by a venerable peasant of the district, that he himself was more than once a witness to this apparition, and the effect which it invariably produced. He had marked the terror which its approach excited amongst horses grazing in the neighbouring fields; and even the wild and unbroken colts would madly plunge away, and galloping to the nearest human being, as if seeking the protection of man, would lay their heads upon his shoulder, and follow him whithersoever he moved, till the influence of the spirit had departed from the neighbourhood.

Of a lighter cast are the fairy traditions of the contiguous *Dun* of *Log-an-chorain*. For instance, it is related that the cheering notes of the bag-pipes are to be heard in the stillness of the night, issuing from the inmost recesses of the numerous caves of natural formation which perforate the rock—the invisible denizens of the caverns, doubtless, footing it in the dance to those lively and unearthly strains. These mysterious beings, however, here, as in numberless other instances, sometimes reveal themselves to human eyes, and mounted and caparisoned as huntsmen, with the accompaniments of hound and horn, congregate in the gloaming of a summer's evening on the *Dun*, and ride forth amongst the neighbouring hills engaged in the chase. The correctness of such an allegation as this will scarcely be questioned, when I state that I had the assurance of its truth from so competent an authority as one Patrick Nowlan, the earth-stopper of the Queen's County Hunt Club, who resides near the spot, and has witnessed those unearthly “meets!”

Such are a few of the most commonly narrated stories in connection with fairy-lore, implicitly believed in this district. Should the members of the Society be sceptical upon the subject of their truthfulness, I must only refer them to the peasantry from whom I gathered them; and if the amount of credibility to which such tales should be deemed to be entitled, is to be estimated solely by the number of witnesses who will positively vouch them—then indeed I may safely assert that those which I have here related, are likely to be placed beyond the possibility of contradiction.

ANCIENT IRISH WATER-MILLS.

The subject of the ancient timber structures so frequently discovered on the margins of streams, or in water-courses filled up, having occupied the attention of the Society for a considerable period, and produced much discussion at several meetings, has terminated most satisfactorily in the eliciting of facts which leave but small grounds for doubt that those fragments of rudely framed timber-work are the remains of the primitive water-mills of Ireland.

At the meeting of November 7th, 1849 (as briefly alluded to in the Transactions for that year, p. 33), Mr. Graves first brought the subject under notice. He stated that, having been informed some time since by Mr. William Phelan, of a discovery made in executing some drainage works on the lands of Ballymartin, near Ballyragget, he had visited the spot, accompanied by the Rev. Samuel Madden, for the purpose of making a personal examination of the matter. It appeared that the workmen, in sinking the main drain about six feet under the surface, along the course of a small runnel of water, had encountered a frame-work of black bog-oak, consisting of a platform about eleven feet long by six broad. The scantling of the side beams was one foot by six inches; into which, at each end, were morticed cross pieces at right angles. The frame thus formed supported a floor of oak boards, some of them three feet wide, and all of them about two inches in thickness. There were mortices for uprights at the angles, but no remains of such uprights existed. The workmanship of the mortices, and one or two holes made by an auger, evinced the use of good tools on the part of the workmen, who, however, did not appear to be acquainted with the saw, as the boards were dressed with an axe. It was hard to conceive what could have been the purpose of such a structure. Were it not sunk so deeply in what always must have been a water-course, it might be conjectured to form the remains of an ancient timber house. But it was inconceivable that any human being who had abundance of dry upland to choose from in the immediate neighbourhood, would fix his residence in such a swamp. Mr. Graves had mentioned the circumstance to